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ALFRED TENNYSON,

CABINET EDITION--IN TEN VOLUMES.

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IN MEMORIAM.

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ARTHUR

FROM A PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDY BY JULIA M. CAMERON.

THE WORKS OF  
ALFRED TENNYSON.

IDYLLS OF THE KING.

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# THE ROUND TABLE

*(CONCLUDED).*



## PELLEAS AND ETTARRE.

KING ARTHUR made new knights to fill the gap  
Left by the Holy Quest ; and as he sat  
In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors  
Were softly sunder'd, and thro' these a youth,  
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields  
Past, and the sunshine came along with him.

‘ Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,  
All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.’  
Such was his cry ; for having heard the King  
Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize  
A golden circlet and a knightly sword—  
Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won  
The golden circlet, for himself the sword :  
And there were those who knew him near the King,  
And promised for him : and Arthur made him knight.



And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—  
But lately come to his inheritance,  
And lord of many a barren isle was he—  
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,  
Across the forest call'd of Dean, to find  
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun  
Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reel'd  
Almost to falling from his horse ; but saw  
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,  
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,  
And here and there great hollies under them ;  
But for a mile all round was open space,  
And fern and heath : and slowly Pelleas drew  
To that dim day, then binding his good horse  
To a tree, cast himself down ; and as he lay  
At random looking over the brown earth  
Thro' that green-glooming twilight of the grove,  
It seem'd to Pelleas that the fern without  
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,  
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.  
Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud  
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird  
Flying, and then a fawn ; and his eyes closed.  
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid  
In special, half-awake he whisper'd, ' Where ?  
O where ? I love thee, tho' I know thee not,  
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,  
And I will make thee with my spear and sword

As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere,  
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.'

Suddenly waken'd with a sound of talk  
And laughter at the limit of the wood,  
And glancing thro' the hoary boles, he saw,  
Strange as to some old prophet might have seem'd  
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,  
Damsels in divers colours like the cloud  
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them  
On horses, and the horses richly trapt  
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood :  
And all the damsels talk'd confusedly,  
And one was pointing this way, and one that,  
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,  
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light.  
There she that seem'd the chief among them said,  
' In happy time behold our pilot-star !  
Youth, we are damsels-errant, and we ride,  
Arm'd as ye see, to tilt against the knights  
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way :  
To right ? to left ? straight forward ? back again ?  
Which ? tell us quickly.'

And Pelleas gazing thought,  
' Is Guinevere herself so beautiful ?'

For large her violet eyes look'd, and her bloom  
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,  
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood ;  
And slender was her hand and small her shape ;  
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,  
She might have seem'd a toy to trifle with,  
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed  
The beauty of her flesh abash'd the boy,  
As tho' it were the beauty of her soul :  
/For as the base man, judging of the good,  
Puts his own baseness in him by default  
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend  
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,  
Believing her ; and when she spake to him,  
Stammer'd, and could not make her a reply.  
For out of the waste islands had he come,  
Where saving his own sisters he had known  
Scarce any but the women of his isles,  
Rough wives, that laugh'd and scream'd against the  
gulls,  
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turn'd the lady round  
And look'd upon her people ; and as when  
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn  
The circle widens till it lip the marge,  
Spread the slow smile thro' all her company.  
Three knights were thereamong ; and they too smiled

Scorning him ; for the lady was Ettarre,  
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, ' O wild and of the woods,  
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech ?  
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,  
Lacking a tongue ? '

' O damsel,' answer'd he,  
' I woke from dreams ; and coming out of gloom  
Was dazzled by the sudden light, and crave  
Pardon : but will ye to Caerleon ? I  
Go likewise : shall I lead you to the King ? '

' Lead then,' she said ; and thro' the woods they  
went.

And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,  
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,  
His broken utterances and bashfulness,  
Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart  
She mutter'd, ' I have lighted on a fool,  
Raw, yet so stale ! ' But since her mind was bent  
On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name  
And title, ' Queen of Beauty,' in the lists  
Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought  
That peradventure he will fight for me,  
And win the circlet : therefore flatter'd him,  
Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deem'd

His wish by hers was echo'd ; and her knights  
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,  
For she was a great lady.

And when they reach'd  
Caerleon, ere they past to lodging, she,  
Taking his hand, ' O the strong hand,' she said,  
' See ! look at mine ! but wilt thou fight for me,  
And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,  
That I may love thee ?'

Then his helpless heart  
Leapt, and he cried, ' Ay ! wilt thou if I win ?'  
' Ay, that will I,' she answer'd, and she laugh'd,  
And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her ;  
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,  
Till all her ladies laugh'd along with her.

' O happy world,' thought Pelleas, ' all, meseems,  
Are happy ; I the happiest of them all,'  
Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,  
(And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves ;  
Then being on the morrow knighted, sware  
To love one only. And as he came away,  
The men who met him rounded on their heels  
And wonder'd after him, because his face  
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old  
Against the flame about a sacrifice

Kindled by fire from heaven : so glad was he :

Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange  
knights  
From the four winds came in : and each one sat,  
Tho' served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea,  
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes  
His neighbour's make and might : and Pelleas look'd  
Noble among the noble, for he dream'd  
His lady loved him, and he knew himself  
Loved of the King : and him his new-made knight  
Worshipt, whose lightest whisper moved him more  
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blush'd and brake the morning of the jousts,  
And this was call'd 'The Tournament of Youth :'  
For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld  
His older and his mightier from the lists,  
That Pelleas might obtain his lady's love,  
According to her promise, and remain  
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts  
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk  
Holden : the gilded parapets were crown'd  
With faces, and the great tower fill'd with eyes  
Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.  
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field  
With honour : so by that strong hand of his  
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved : the heat  
Of pride and glory fired her face ; her eye  
Sparkled ; she caught the circlet from his lance,  
And there before the people crown'd herself :  
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look  
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—  
Linger'd Ettarre : and seeing Pelleas droop,  
Said Guinevere, ' We marvel at thee much,  
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face  
To him who won thee glory ! ' And she said,  
' Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,  
My Queen, he had not won.' Whereat the Queen,  
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,  
Glanced down upon her, turn'd and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,  
And those three knights all set their faces home,  
Sir Pelleas follow'd. She that saw him cried,  
' Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it—  
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back  
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had  
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,  
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride  
And jest with : take him to you, keep him off,  
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,  
• Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,

Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.  
Nay, should yè try him with a merry one  
To find his mettle, good : and if he fly us,  
Small matter ! let him.' This her damsels heard,  
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,  
They, closing round him thro' the journey home,  
Acted her hest, and always from her side  
Restrain'd him with all manner of device,  
So that he could not come to speech with her.  
And when she gain'd her castle, upsprang the bridge,  
Down rang the grate of iron thro' the groove,  
And he was left alone in open field.

'These be the ways of ladies,' Pelleas thought,  
'To those who love them, trials of our faith.  
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,  
For loyal to the uttermost am I.'  
So made his moan ; and, darkness falling, sought  
A priory not far off, there lodged, but rose  
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,  
Full-arm'd upon his charger all day long  
Sat by the walls, and no one open'd to him.

And this persistence turn'd her scorn to wrath.  
Then calling her three knights, she charged them,  
'Out !  
And drive him from the walls.' And out they came.  
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dash'd



Against him one by one ; and these return'd,  
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate ; and once,  
A week beyond, while walking on the walls  
With her three knights, she pointed downward, 'Look,  
He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me ;  
Down ! strike him ! put my hate into your strokes,  
And drive him from my walls.' And down they went,  
And Pelleas overthrew them one by one ;  
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,  
' Bind him, and bring him in.'

He heard her voice ;  
Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown  
Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew  
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight  
Of her rich beauty made him at one glance  
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.  
Yet with good cheer he spake, ' Behold me, Lady,  
A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will ;  
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,  
Content am I so that I see thy face  
But once a day : for I have sworn my vows,  
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know  
That all these pains are trials of my faith,

And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strain'd  
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length  
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.'

Then she began to rail so bitterly,  
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute ;  
But when she mock'd his vows and the great King,  
Lighted on words : 'For pity of thine own self,  
Peace, Lady, peace : is he not thine and mine ?'  
'Thou fool,' she said, 'I never heard his voice  
But long'd to break away. Unbind him now,  
And thrust him out of doors ; for save he be  
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,  
He will return no more.' And those, her three,  
Laugh'd, and unbound, and thrust him from the gate.

And after this, a week beyond, again  
She call'd them, saying, 'There he watches yet,  
There like a dog before his master's door !  
Kick'd, he returns : do ye not hate him, ye ?  
Ye know yourselves : how can ye bide at peace,  
Affronted with his fulsome innocence ?  
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,  
No men to strike ? Fall on him all at once,  
And if ye slay him I reck not : if ye fail,  
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,  
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in :  
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds.'

And down they ran,  
Her damsels, crying to their lady, 'Lo !  
Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath  
His horse and armour : will ye let him in ?  
He slew him ! Gawain, Gawain of the court,  
Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,  
Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay.'

And so, leave given, straight on thro' open door  
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.  
'Dead, is it so?' she ask'd. 'Ay, ay,' said he,  
'And oft in dying cried upon your name.'  
'Pity on him,' she answer'd, 'a good knight,  
But never let me bide one hour at peace.'  
'Ay,' thought Gawain, 'and you be fair enow :  
But I to your dead man have given my troth,  
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love.'

So those three days, aimless about the land,  
Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering  
Waited, until the third night brought a moon  
With promise of large light on woods and ways.

Hot was the night and silent ; but a sound  
Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay—  
Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,  
And seen her sadden listening—vext his heart,  
And marr'd his rest—'A worm within the rose.'

'A rose, but one, none other rose had I,  
A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,  
One rose, a rose that gladden'd earth and sky,  
One rose, my rose, that sweeten'd all mine air—  
I cared not for the thorns ; the thorns were there.

'One rose, a rose to gather by and by,  
One rose, one rose, to gather and to wear,  
No rose but one—what other rose had I ?  
One rose, my rose ; a rose that will not die,—  
He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.'

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,  
'Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?'  
So shook him that he could not rest, but rode  
Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse  
Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,  
And no watch kept ; and in thro' these he past,  
And heard but his own steps, and his own heart  
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,  
And his own shadow. Then he crost the court,  
And spied not any light in hall or bower,  
But saw the postern portal also wide  
Yawning ; and up a slope of garden, all  
Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt  
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,  
Here too, all hush'd below the mellow moon,  
Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave

Came lightening downward, and so spilt itself  
Among the roses, and was lost again.

Then was he ware of three pavilions rear'd  
Above the bushes, gilden-peakt : in one,  
Red after revel, droned her lurdane knights  
Slumbering, and their three squires across their feet :  
In one, their malice on the placid lip  
Froz'n by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay :  
And in the third, the circlet of the jousts  
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.

Back, as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf  
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew :  
Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears  
To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound  
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame  
Creep with his shadow thro' the court again,  
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood  
There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,  
'I will go back, and slay them where they lie.'

And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep  
Said, 'Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,  
Your sleep is death,' and drew the sword, and  
thought,  
'What ! slay a sleeping knight ? the King hath bound  
And sworn me to this brotherhood ;' again,

'Alas that ever a knight should be so false.'  
Then turn'd, and so return'd, and groaning laid  
The naked sword athwart their naked throats,  
There left it, and them sleeping ; and she lay,  
The circlet of the tourney round her brows,  
And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he past, and mounting on his horse  
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves  
In their own darkness, throng'd into the moon.  
Then crush'd the saddle with his thighs, and clench'd  
His hands, and madden'd with himself and moan'd :

'Would they have risen against me in their blood  
At the last day ? I might have answer'd them  
Even before high God. O towers so strong,  
Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze  
The crack of earthquake shivering to your base  
Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs  
Bellowing, and charr'd you thro' and thro' within,  
Black as the harlot's heart—hollow as a skull !  
Let the fierce east scream thro' your eyelet-holes,  
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round  
In dung and nettles ! hiss, snake—I saw him there—  
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells  
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—  
I, the poor Pelleas whom she call'd her fool ?  
Fool, beast—he, she, or I ? myself most fool ;

Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,  
Dishonour'd all for trial of true love—  
Love?—we be all alike : only the King  
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows !  
O great and sane and simple race of brutes  
That own no lust because they have no law !  
For why should I have loved her to my shame ?  
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.  
I never loved her, I but lusted for her—  
Away—'

He dash'd the rowel into his horse,  
And bounded forth and vanish'd thro' the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,  
Awaking knew the sword, and turn'd herself  
To Gawain : ' Liar, for thou hast not slain  
This Pelleas ! here he stood, and might have slain  
Me and thyself.' And he that tells the tale  
Says that her ever-veering fancy turn'd  
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,  
And only lover ; and thro' her love her life  
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,  
And over hard and soft, striking the sod  
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,  
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,

Beside that tower where Percivale was cowl'd,  
 Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.  
 For so the words were flash'd into his heart  
 He knew not whence or wherefore : ' O sweet star,  
 Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn !'  
 And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes  
 Harder and drier than a fountain bed  
 In summer : thither came the village girls  
 And linger'd talking, and they come no more  
 Till the sweet heavens have fill'd it from the heights  
 Again with living waters in the change  
 Of seasons : hard his eyes ; harder his heart  
 Seem'd ; but so weary were his limbs, that he,  
 Gasping, ' Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,  
 Here let me rest and die,' cast himself down,  
 And gulf'd his griefs in inmost sleep ; so lay,  
 Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired  
 The hall of Merlin, and the morning star  
 Reel'd in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of some one nigh,  
 Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,  
 ' False ! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.'

But Percivale stood near him and replied,  
 ' Am I-but false as Guinevere is pure ?  
 Or art thou mazed with dreams ? or being one  
 Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard



That Lancelot'—there he check'd himself and paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one  
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword  
That made it plunges thro' the wound again,  
And pricks it deeper : and he shrank and wail'd,  
'Is the Queen false?' and Percivale was mute.  
'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?'  
And Percivale made answer not a word.  
'Is the King true?' 'The King !' said Percivale.  
'Why then let men couple at once with wolves.  
What ! art thou mad ?'

But Pelleas, leaping up,  
Ran thro' the doors and vaulted on his horse  
And fled : small pity upon his horse had he,  
Or on himself, or any, and when he met  
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—  
Hunch'd as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm  
That turns its back on the salt blast, the boy  
Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, 'False,  
And false with Gawain !' and so left him bruised  
And batter'd, and fled on, and hill and wood  
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,  
That follows on the turning of the world,  
Darken'd the common path : he twitch'd the reins,  
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve  
Now off it and now on ; but when he saw

High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built  
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,  
'Black nest of rats,' he groan'd, 'ye build too high.'

Not long thereafter from the city gates  
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,  
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,  
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star  
And marvelling what it was : on whom the boy,  
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass  
Borne, clash'd : and Lancelot, saying, 'What name  
hast thou

That ridest here so blindly and so hard ?'

'I have no name,' he shouted, 'a scourge am I,  
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.'

'Yea, but thy name?' 'I have many names,' he  
cried :

'I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,  
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast  
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.'

'First over me,' said Lancelot, 'shalt thou pass.'

'Fight therefore,' yell'd the other, and either knight  
Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once  
The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung  
His rider, who call'd out from the dark field,

'Thou art false as Hell : slay me : I have no  
sword.'

Then Lancelot, 'Yea, between thy lips—and sharp ;

But here will I disedge it by thy death.'  
'Slay then,' he shriek'd, 'my will is to be slain.'  
And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fall'n,  
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake :  
'Rise, weakling ; I am Lancelot ; say thy say.'

And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back  
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while  
Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,  
And follow'd to the city. It chanced that both  
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.  
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.  
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot  
So soon return'd, and then on Pelleas, him  
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself  
Down on a bench, hard-breathing. 'Have ye  
fought?'

She ask'd of Lancelot. 'Ay, my Queen,' he said.  
'And thou hast overthrown him?' 'Ay, my  
Queen.'

Then she, turning to Pelleas, 'O young knight,  
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee fail'd  
So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,  
A fall from him?' Then, for he answer'd not,  
'Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,  
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me  
know.'

But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce

She quail'd ; and he, hissing 'I have no sword,'  
Sprang from the door into the dark. • The Queen  
Look'd hard upon her lover, he on her ; .  
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be :  
And all talk died, as in a grove all song  
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey ;  
Then a long silence came upon the hall,  
And Modred thought, ' The time is hard at hand.'

## THE LAST TOURNAMENT.

DAGONET, the fool, whom Gawain in his mood  
 Had made mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round,  
 At Camelot, high above the yellowing woods,  
 Danced like a wither'd leaf before the hall.  
 And toward him from the hall, with harp in hand,  
 And from the crown thereof a carcanet  
 Of ruby swaying to and fro, the prize  
 Of Tristram in the jousts of yesterday,  
 Came Tristram, saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'

For Arthur and Sir Lancelot riding once  
 Far down beneath a winding wall of rock  
 Heard a child wail. A stump of oak half-dead,  
 From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,  
 Clutch'd at the crag, and started thro' mid air  
 Bearing an eagle's nest : and thro' the tree  
 Rush'd ever a rainy wind, and thro' the wind

Pierced ever a child's cry : and crag and tree  
Scaling, Sir Lancelot from the perilous nest,  
This ruby necklace thrice around her neck,  
And all unscarr'd from beak or talon, brought  
A maiden babe ; which Arthur pitying took,  
Then gave it to his Queen to rear : the Queen  
But coldly acquiescing, in her white arms  
Received, and after loved it tenderly,  
And named it Nestling ; so forgot herself  
A moment, and her cares ; till that young life  
Being smitten in mid heaven with mortal cold  
Past from her ; and in time the carcanet  
Vext her with plaintive memories of the child :  
So she, delivering it to Arthur, said,  
' Take thou the jewels of this dead innocence,  
And make them, an thou wilt, a tourney-prize.'

To whom the King, ' Peace to thine eagle-borne  
Dead nestling, and this honour after death,  
Following thy will ! but, O my Queen, I muse  
Why ye not wear on arm, or neck, or zone  
Those diamonds that I rescued from the tarn,  
And Lancelot won, methought, for thee to wear.'

' Would rather you had let them fall,' she cried,  
' Plunge and be lost—ill-fated as they were,  
A bitterness to me !—ye look amazed,  
Not knowing they were lost as soon as given—

Slid from my hands, when I was leaning out  
Above the river—that unhappy child  
Past in her barge : but rosier luck will go  
With these rich jewels, seeing that they came  
Not from the skeleton of a brother-slayer,  
But the sweet body of a maiden babe.  
Perchance—who knows?—the purest of thy knights  
May win them for the purest of my maids.'

She ended, and the cry of a great jousts  
With trumpet-blowings ran on all the ways  
From Camelot in among the faded fields  
To furthest towers ; and everywhere the knights  
Arm'd for a day of glory before the King.

But on the hither side of that loud morn  
Into the hall stagger'd, his visaged ribb'd  
From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals, his nose  
Bridge-broken, one eye out, and one hand off  
And one with shatter'd fingers dangling lame,  
A churl, to whom indignantly the King,

' My churl, for whom Christ died, what evil beast  
Hath drawn his claws athwart thy face? or fiend?  
Man was it who marr'd heaven's image in thee thus?'

Then, sputtering thro' the hedge of splinter'd teeth,  
Yet strangers to the tongue, and with blunt stump

Pitch-blacken'd sawing the air, said the maim'd churl,

‘He took them and he drave them to his tower—  
Some hold he was a table-knight of thine—  
A hundred goodly ones—the Red Knight, he—  
Lord, I was tending swine, and the Red Knight  
Brake in upon me and drave them to his tower ;  
And when I call'd upon thy name as one  
That doest right by gentle and by churl,  
Maim'd me and maul'd, and would outright have  
slain,

Save that he sware me to a message, saying,  
“Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I  
Have founded my Round Table in the North,  
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn  
My knights have sworn the counter to it—and say  
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,  
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess  
To be none other than themselves—and say  
My knights are all adulterers like his own,  
But mine are truer, seeing they profess  
To be none other ; and say his hour is come,  
The heathen are upon him, his long lance  
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.”

Then Arthur turn'd to Kay the seneschal,  
‘Take thou my churl, and tend him curiously  
Like a king's heir, till all his hurts be whole.



The heathen—but that ever-climbing wave,  
Hurl'd back again so often in empty foam,  
Hath lain for years at rest—and renegades,  
Thieves, bandits, leavings of confusion, whom  
The wholesome realm is purged of elsewhere,  
Friends, thro' your manhood and your fealty,—now  
Make their last head like Satan in the North.  
My younger knights, new-made, in whom your flower  
Waits to be solid fruit of golden deeds,  
Move with me toward their quelling, which achieved,  
The loneliest ways are safe from shore to shore.  
But thou, Sir Lancelot, sitting in my place  
Enchair'd to-morrow, arbitrate the field;  
For wherefore shouldst thou care to mingle with it,  
Only to yield my Queen her own again?  
Speak, Lancelot, thou art silent: is it well?

Thereto Sir Lancelot answer'd, 'It is well:  
Yet better if the King abide, and leave  
The leading of his younger knights to me.  
Else, for the King has will'd it, it is well.'

Then Arthur rose and Lancelot follow'd him,  
And while they stood without the doors, the King  
Turn'd to him saying, 'Is it then so well?  
Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he  
Of whom was written, "A sound is in his ears"?  
The foot that loiters, bidden go,—the glance

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That only seems half-loyal to command,—  
A manner somewhat fall'n from reverence—  
Or have I dream'd the bearing of our knights  
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?  
Or whence the fear lest this my realm, uprear'd,  
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,  
From flat confusion and brute violences,  
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?'

He spoke, and taking all his younger knights,  
Down the slope city rode, and sharply turn'd  
North by the gate. In her high bower the Queen,  
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,  
Watch'd her lord pass, and knew not that she  
sigh'd.

Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme  
Of bygone Merlin, 'Where is he who knows?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

But when the morning of a tournament,  
By these in earnest those in mockery call'd  
The Tournament of the Dead Innocence,  
Brake with a wet wind blowing, Lancelot,  
Round whose sick head all night, like birds of prey,  
The words of Arthur flying shriek'd, arose,  
And down a streetway hung with folds of pure  
White samite, and by fountains running wine,  
Where children sat in white with cups of gold,

Moved to the lists, and there, with slow sad steps  
Ascending, fill'd his double-dragon'd chair.

He glanced and saw the stately galleries,  
Dame, damsel, each thro' worship of their Queen  
White-robed in honour of the stainless child,  
And some with scatter'd jewels, like a bank  
Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire.  
He look'd but once, and veil'd his eyes again.

The sudden trumpet sounded as in a dream  
To ears but half-awaked, then one low roll  
Of Autumn thunder, and the jousts began :  
And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf  
And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn  
plume

Went down it. Sighing wearily, as one  
Who sits and gazes on a faded fire,  
When all the goodlier guests are past away,  
Sat their great umpire, looking o'er the lists.  
He saw the laws that ruled the tournament  
Broken, but spake not ; once, a knight cast down  
Before his throne of arbitration cursed  
The dead babe and the follies of the King ;  
And once the laces of a helmet crack'd,  
And show'd him, like a vermin in its hole,  
Modred, a narrow face : anon he heard  
The voice that billow'd round the barriers roar

An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight,  
But newly-enter'd, taller than the rest,  
And armour'd all in forest green, whereon  
There tript a hundred tiny silver deer,  
And wearing but a holly-spray for crest,  
With ever-scattering berries, and on shield  
A spear, a harp, a bugle—Tristram—late  
From overseas in Brittany return'd,  
And marriage with a princess of that realm,  
Isolt the White—Sir Tristram of the Woods—  
Whom Lancelot knew, had held sometime with  
pain

His own against him, and now yearn'd to shake  
The burthen off his heart in one full shock  
With Tristram ev'n to death: his strong hands  
gript

And dinted the gilt dragons right and left,  
Until he groan'd for wrath—so many of those,  
That ware their ladies' colours on the casque,  
Drew from before Sir Tristram to the bounds,  
And there with gibes and flickering mockeries  
Stood, while he mutter'd, 'Craven crests! O  
shame!

What faith have these in whom they swear to love?  
The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

So Tristram won, and Lancelot gave the gems,  
Not speaking other word than 'Hast thou won?'

Art thou the purest, brother? See, the hand  
 Wherewith thou takest this, is red !' to whom  
 Tristram, half 'plagued by Lancelot's languorous  
 mood,

Made answer, 'Ay, but wherefore toss me this  
 Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound?  
 Let be thy fair Queen's fantasy. Strength of heart  
 And might of limb, but mainly use and skill,  
 Are winners in this pastime of our King.  
 My hand—belike the lance hath dript upon it—  
 No blood of mine, I trow; but O chief knight,  
 Right arm of Arthur in the battle-field,  
 Great brother, thou nor I have made the world;  
 Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine.'

And Tristram round the gallery made his horse  
 Caracole; then bow'd his homage, bluntly saying,  
 'Fair damsels, each to him who worships each  
 Sole Queen of Beauty and of love, behold  
 This day my Queen of Beauty is not here.'  
 And most of these were mute, some anger'd, one  
 Murmuring, 'All courtesy is dead,' and one, <sup>87</sup>  
 'The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

Then fell thick rain, plume droopt and mantle  
 clung,  
 And pettish cries awoke, and the wan day  
 Went glooming down in wet and weariness:

But under her black brows a swarthy one  
Laugh'd shrilly, crying, 'Praise the patient saints,  
Our one white day of Innocence hath past,  
Tho' somewhat draggled at the skirt. So be it.  
The snowdrop only, flowering thro' the year,  
Would make the world as blank as Winter-tide.  
Come—let us gladden their sad eyes, our Queen's  
And Lancelot's, at this night's solemnity  
With all the kindlier colours of the field.'

So dame and damsel glitter'd at the feast  
Variously gay : for he that tells the tale  
Likened them, saying, as when an hour of cold  
Falls on the mountain in midsummer snows,  
And all the purple slopes of mountain flowers  
Pass under white, till the warm hour returns  
With veer of wind, and all are flowers again ;  
So dame and damsel cast the simple white,  
And glowing in all colours, the live grass,  
Rose-campion, bluebell, kingcup, poppy, glanced  
About the revels, and with mirth so loud  
Beyond all use, that, half-amazed, the Queen,  
And wroth at Tristram and the lawless jousts,  
Brake up their sports, then slowly to her bower  
Parted, and in her bosom pain was lord.

And little Dagonet on the morrow morn,  
High over all the yellowing Autumn-tide,

Danced like a wither'd leaf before the hall.  
Then Tristram saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'  
Wheel'd round on either heel, Dagonet replied,  
'Belike for lack of wiser company ;  
Or being fool, and seeing too much wit  
Makes the world rotten, why, belike I skip  
To know myself the wisest knight of all.'  
'Ay, fool,' said Tristram, 'but 'tis eating dry  
To dance without a catch, a roundelay  
To dance to.' Then he twangled on his harp,  
And while he twangled little Dagonet stood,  
Quiet as any water-sodden log  
Stay'd in the wandering warble of a brook ;  
But when the twangling ended, skipt again ;  
And being ask'd, 'Why skipt ye not, Sir Fool?'  
Made answer, 'I had liefer twenty years  
Skip to the broken music of my brains  
Than any broken music thou canst make.'  
Then Tristram, waiting for the quip to come,  
'Good now, what music have I broken, fool?'  
And little Dagonet, skipping, 'Arthur, the King's ;  
For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,  
Thou makest broken music with thy bride,  
Her daintier namesake down in Brittany—  
And so thou breakest Arthur's music too.'  
'Save for that broken music in thy brains,  
Sir Fool,' said Tristram, 'I would break thy head.  
Fool, I came late, the heathen wars were o'er,

The life had flown, we sware but by the shell—  
I am but a fool to reason with a fool—  
Come, thou art crabb'd and sour : but lean me down  
Sir Dagonet, one of thy long asses' ears,  
And harken if my music be not true.

“Free love—free field—we love but while we  
may :

The woods are hush'd, their music is no more :  
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away :  
New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o'er :  
New life, new love, to suit the newer day :  
New loves are sweet as those that went before :  
Free love—free field—we love but while we may.”

‘Ye might have moved slow-measure to my tune,  
Not stood stockstill. I made it in the woods,  
And heard it ring as true as tested gold.’

But Dagonet with one foot poised in his hand,  
‘Friend, did ye mark that fountain yesterday  
Made to run wine?—but this had run itself  
All out like a long life to a sour end—  
And them that round it sat with golden cups  
To hand the wine to whosoever came—  
The twelve small damosels white as Innocence,  
In honour of poor Innocence the babe,  
Who left the gems which Innocence the Queen



Lent to the King, and Innocence the King  
Gave for a prize—and one of those white slips  
Handed her cup and piped, the pretty one,  
“Drink, drink, Sir Fool,” and thereupon I drank,  
Spat—pish—the cup was gold, the draught was mud.

And Tristram, ‘Was it muddier than thy gibes?  
Is all the laughter gone dead out of thee?—  
Not marking how the knighthood mock thee, fool—  
“Fear God : honour the King — his one true  
knight—

Sole follower of the vows”—for here be they  
Who knew thee swine enow before I came,  
Smuttier than blasted grain : but when the King  
Had made thee fool, thy vanity so shot up  
It frightened all free fool from out thy heart ;  
Which left thee less than fool, and less than swine,  
A naked aught—yet swine I hold thee still,  
For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine.’

And little Dagonet mincing with his feet,  
‘Knight, an ye fling those rubies round my neck  
In lieu of hers, I’ll hold thou hast some touch  
Of music, since I care not for thy pearls.  
Swine? I have wallow’d, I have wash’d—the world  
Is flesh and shadow—I have had my day.  
The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind  
Hath foul’d me—an I wallow’d, then I wash’d—

I have had my day and my philosophies—  
And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool.  
Swine, say ye? swine, goats, asses, rams and geese  
Troop'd round a Paynim harper once, who thrumm'd  
On such a wire as musically as thou  
Some such fine song—but never a king's fool.'

And Tristram, 'Then were swine, goats, asses,  
geese  
The wiser fools, seeing thy Paynim bard  
Had such a mastery of his mystery  
That he could harp his wife up out of hell.'

Then Dagonet, turning on the ball of his foot,  
'And whither harp'st thou thine? down! and thyself  
Down! and two more: a helpful harper thou,  
That harpest downward! Dost thou know the star  
We call the harp of Arthur up in heaven?'

And Tristram, 'Ay, Sir Fool, for when our King  
Was victor wellnigh day by day, the knights,  
Glorying in each new glory, set his name  
High on all hills, and in the signs of heaven.'

And Dagonet answer'd, 'Ay, and when the land  
Was freed, and the Queen false, ye set yourself  
To babble about him, all to show your wit—  
And whether he were King by courtesy,

Or King by right—and so went harping down  
The black king's highway, got so far, and grew  
So witty that ye play'd at ducks and drakes  
With Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire.  
Tuwhoo ! do ye see it ? do ye see the star ?

‘Nay, fool,’ said Tristram, ‘not in open day.’  
And Dagonet, ‘Nay, nor will : I see it and hear.  
It makes a silent music up in heaven,  
And I, and Arthur and the angels hear,  
And then we skip.’ ‘Lo, fool,’ he said, ‘ye talk  
Fool's treason : is the King thy brother fool ?’  
Then little Dagonet clapt his hands and shrill'd,  
‘Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools !  
Conceits himself as God that he can make  
Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk  
From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,  
And men from beasts—Long live the king of fools !’

And down the city Dagonet danced away ;  
But thro' the slowly-mellowing avenues  
And solitary passes of the wood  
Rode Tristram toward Lyonesse and the west.  
Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt  
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore  
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood  
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye  
For all that walk'd, or crept, or perch'd, or flew.

Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown,  
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape  
Of one that in them sees himself, return'd;  
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,  
Or ev'n a fall'n feather, vanish'd again.

So on for all that day from lawn to lawn  
Thro' many a league-long bower he rode. At length  
A lodge of intertwisted beechen-boughs  
Furze-cramm'd, and bracken-rooft, the which himself  
Built for a summer day with Queen Isolt  
Against a shower, dark in the golden grove  
Appearing, sent his fancy back to where  
She lived a moon in that low lodge with him:  
Till Mark her lord had past, the Cornish king,  
With six or seven, when Tristram was away,  
And snatch'd her thence; yet dreading worse than  
shame

Her warrior Tristram, spake not any word,  
But bode his hour, devising wretchedness.

And now that desert lodge to Tristram lookt  
So sweet, that halting, in he past, and sank  
Down on a drift of foliage random-blown;  
But could not rest for musing how to smoothe  
And sleek his marriage over to the Queen.  
Perchance in lone Tintagil far from all  
The tonguesters of the court she had not heard.

But then what folly had sent him overseas  
After she left him lonely here? a name?  
Was it the name of one in Brittany,  
Isolt, the daughter of the King? 'Isolt  
Of the white hands' they call'd her: the sweet  
name

Allured him first, and then the maid herself,  
Who served him well with those white hands of hers,  
And loved him well, until himself had thought  
He loved her also, wedded easily,  
But left her all as easily, and return'd.  
The black-blue Irish hair and Irish eyes  
Had drawn him home—what marvel? then he laid  
His brows upon the drifted leaf and dream'd.

He seem'd to pace the strand of Brittany  
Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,  
And show'd them both the ruby-chain, and both  
Began to struggle for it, till his Queen  
Graspt it so hard, that all her hand was red.  
Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!  
These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,  
And melts within her hand—her hand is hot  
With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,  
Is all as cool and white as any flower.'  
Follow'd a rush of eagle's wings, and then  
A whimpering of the spirit of the child,  
Because the twain had spoil'd her carcanet.

He dream'd ; but Arthur with a hundred spears  
Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,  
And many a glancing plash and sallowy isle,  
The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh  
Glared on a huge machicolated tower  
That stood with open doors, whereout was roll'd  
A roar of riot, as from men secure  
Amid their marshes, ruffians at their ease  
Among their harlot-brides, an evil song.  
'Lo there,' said one of Arthur's youth, for there,  
High on a grim dead tree before the tower,  
A goodly brother of the Table Round  
Swung by the neck : and on the boughs a shield  
Showing a shower of blood in a field noir,  
And therebeside a horn, inflamed the knights  
At that dishonour done the gilded spur,  
Till each would clash the shield, and blow the horr.  
But Arthur waved them back. Alone he rode.  
Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn,  
That sent the face of all the marsh aloft  
An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud  
Of shriek and plume, the Red Knight heard, and all,  
Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm,  
In blood-red armour sallying, howl'd to the King,

'The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!—  
Lo ! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King  
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world—

The woman-worshipper? Yea, God's curse, and I !  
Slain was the brother of my paramour  
By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine  
And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too,  
Sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,  
And stings itself to everlasting death,  
To hang whatever knight of thine I fought  
And tumbled. Art thou King?—Look to thy life !

He ended : Arthur knew the voice ; the face  
Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name  
Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind.  
And Arthur deign'd not use of word or sword,  
But let the drunkard, as he stretch'd from horse  
To strike him, overbalancing his bulk,  
Down from the causeway heavily to the swamp  
Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave,  
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,  
Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,  
From less and less to nothing ; thus he fell  
Head-heavy ; then the knights, who watch'd him, roar'd  
And shouted and leapt down upon the fall'n ;  
There trampled out his face from being known,  
And sank his head in mire, and slimed themselves :  
Nor heard the King for their own cries, but sprang  
Thro' open doors, and swording right and left

Men, women, on their sodden faces, hurl'd  
The tables over and the wines, and slew  
Till all the rafters rang with woman-yells,  
And all the pavement stream'd with massacre :  
Then, yell with yell echoing, they fired the tower,  
Which half that autumn night, like the live North,  
Red-pulsing up thro' Alioth and Alcor,  
Made all above it, and a hundred meres  
About it, as the water Moab saw  
Come round by the East, and out beyond them  
flush'd  
The long low dune, and lazy-plunging sea.

So all the ways were safe from shore to shore,  
But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord.

Then, out of Tristram waking, the red dream  
Fled with a shout, and that low lodge return'd,  
Mid-forest, and the wind among the boughs.  
He whistled his good warhorse left to graze  
Among the forest greens, vaulted upon him,  
And rode beneath an ever-showering leaf,  
Till one lone woman, weeping near a cross,  
Stay'd him. 'Why weep ye?' 'Lord,' she said, 'my  
man  
Hath left me or is dead ;' whereon he thought—  
'What, if she hate me now? I would not this.  
What, if she love me still? I would not that.'



I know not what I would '—but said to her,  
' Yet weep not thou, lest, if thy mate return,  
He find thy favour changed and love thee not '—  
Then pressing day by day thro' Lyonesse  
Last in a roky hollow, belling, heard  
The hounds of Mark, and felt the goodly hounds  
Yelp at his heart, but turning, past and gain'd  
Tintagil, half in sea, and high on land,  
A crown of towers.

Down in a casement sat,  
A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair  
And glossy-throated grace, Isolt the Queen.  
And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind  
The spiring stone that scaled about her tower,  
Flush'd, started, met him at the doors, and there  
Belted his body with her white embrace,  
Crying aloud, ' Not Mark—not Mark, my soul !  
The footstep flutter'd me at first : not he :  
Catlike thro' his own castle steals my Mark,  
But warrior-wise thou stridest thro' his halls  
Who hates thee, as I him—ev'n to the death.  
My soul, I felt my hatred for my Mark  
Quickened within me, and knew that thou wert nigh.'  
To whom Sir Tristram smiling, ' I am here.  
Let be thy Mark, seeing he is not thine.'

And drawing somewhat backward she replied,

' Can he be wrong'd who is not ev'n his own,  
But save for dread of thee had beaten me,  
Scratch'd, bitten, blinded, marr'd me somehow—Mark?  
What rights are his that dare not strike for them?  
Not lift a hand—not, tho' he found me thus!  
But harken! have ye met him? hence he went  
To-day for three days' hunting—as he said—  
And so returns belike within an hour.  
Mark's way, my soul!—but eat not thou with Mark,  
Because he hates thee even more than fears;  
Nor drink: and when thou passest any wood  
Close vizard, lest an arrow from the bush  
Should leave me all alone with Mark and hell.  
My God, the measure of my hate for Mark  
Is as the measure of my love for thee.'

So, pluck'd one way by hate and one by love,  
Drain'd of her force, again she sat, and spake  
To Tristram, as he knelt before her, saying,  
' O hunter, and O blower of the horn,  
Harper, and thou hast been a rover too,  
For, ere I mated with my shambling king,  
Ye twain had fallen out about the bride  
Of one—his name is out of me—the prize,  
If prize she were—(what marvel—she could see)—  
Thine, friend; and ever since my craven seeks  
To wreck thee villainously: but, O Sir Knight,  
What dame or damsel have ye kneel'd to last?'

And Tristram, 'Last to my Queen Paramount,  
Here now to my Queen Paramount of love  
And loveliness—ay, lovelier than when first  
Her light feet fell on our rough Lyonesse,  
Sailing from Ireland.'

Softly laugh'd Isolt ;  
'Flatter me not, for hath not our great Queen  
My dole of beauty trebled?' and he said,  
'Her beauty is her beauty, and thine thine,  
And thine is more to me—soft, gracious, kind—  
Save when thy Mark is kindled on thy lips  
Most gracious ; but she, haughty, ev'n to him,  
Lancelot ; for I have seen him wan enow  
To make one doubt if ever the great Queen  
Have yielded him her love.'

To whom Isolt,  
'Ah then, false hunter and false harper, thou  
Who brakest thro' the scruple of my bond,  
Calling me thy white hind, and saying to me  
That Guinevere had sinn'd against the highest,  
And I—misyoked with such a want of man—  
That I could hardly sin against the lowest.'

He answer'd, 'O my soul, be comforted !  
If this be sweet, to sin in leading-strings,  
If here be comfort, and if ours be sin,

Crown'd warrant had we for the crowning sin  
That made us happy : but how ye greet me—fear  
And fault and doubt—no word of that fond tale—  
Thy deep heart-yearnings, thy sweet memories  
Of Tristram in that year he was away.'

And, saddening on the sudden, spake Isolt,  
'I had forgotten all in my strong joy  
To see thee—yearnings?—ay! for, hour by hour,  
Here in the never-ended afternoon,  
O sweeter than all memories of thee,  
Deeper than any yearnings after thee  
Seem'd those far-rolling, westward-smiling seas,  
Watch'd from this tower. Isolt of Britain dash'd  
Before Isolt of Brittany on the strand,  
Would that have chill'd her bride-kiss? Wedded her?  
Fought in her father's battles? wounded there?  
The King was all fulfill'd with gratefulness,  
And she, my namesake of the hands, that heal'd  
Thy hurt and heart with unguent and caress—  
Well—can I wish her any huger wrong  
Than having known thee? her too hast thou left  
To pine and waste in those sweet memories.  
O, were I not my Mark's, by whom all men  
Are noble, I should hate thee more than love.'

And Tristram, fondling her light hands, replied,  
'Grace, Queen, for being loved : she loved me well.

Did I love her? the name at least I loved.  
Isolt?—I fought his battles, for Isolt!  
The night was dark; the true star set. Isolt!  
The name was ruler of the dark——Isolt?  
Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek,  
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God.'

And Isolt answer'd, 'Yea, and why not I?  
Mine is the larger need, who am not meek,  
Pale-blooded, prayerful. Let me tell thee now.  
Here one black, mute midsummer night I sat,  
Lonely, but musing on thee, wondering where,  
Murmuring a light song I had heard thee sing,  
'And once or twice I spake thy name aloud.

Then flash'd a levin-brand; and near me stood,  
In fuming sulphur blue and green, a fiend—  
Mark's way to steal behind one in the dark—  
For there was Mark: "He has wedded her," he  
said,  
Not said, but hiss'd it: then this crown of towers  
So shook to such a roar of all the sky,  
That here in utter dark I swoon'd away,  
And woke again in utter dark, and cried,  
"I will flee hence and give myself to God"—  
And thou wert lying in thy new leman's arms.'

Then Tristram, ever dallying with her hand,

May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray,  
And past desire !' a saying that anger'd her.

"May God be with thee, sweet, when thou art  
old,

And sweet no more to me !" I need Him now.

For when had Lancelot utter'd aught so gross  
Ev'n to the swineherd's malkin in the mast ?

The greater man, the greater courtesy.

Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight !

But thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild beasts—

Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance  
Becomes thee well—art grown wild beast thyself.

How dardest thou, if lover, push me even

In fancy from thy side, and set me far

In the gray distance, half a life away,

Her to be loved no more ? Unsay it, unswear !

Flatter me rather, seeing me so weak,

Broken with Mark and hate and solitude,

Thy marriage and mine own, that I should suck

Lies like sweet wines : lie to me : I believe.

Will ye not lie ? not swear, as there ye kneel,

And solemnly as when ye sware to him,

The man of men, our King—My God, the power

Was once in vows when men believed the King !

They lied not then, who sware, and thro' their  
vows

The King prevailing made his realm :—I say,

Swear to me thou wilt love me ev'n when old,

Gray-hair'd, and past desire, and in despair.'

Then Tristram, pacing moodily up and down,  
'Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark  
More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,  
The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself—  
My knighthood taught me this—ay, being snapt—  
We run more counter to the soul thereof  
Than had we never sworn. I swear no more.  
I swore to the great King, and am forsworn.  
For once—ev'n to the height—I honour'd him:  
"Man, is he man at all?" methought, when first  
I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld  
That victor of the Pagan throned in hall—  
His hair, a sun that ray'd from off a brow  
Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,  
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light—  
Moreover, that weird legend of his birth,  
With Merlin's mystic babble about his end  
Amazed me; then, his foot was on a stool  
Shaped as a dragon; he seem'd to me no man,  
But Michaël trampling Satan; so I sware,  
Being amazed: but this went by—The vows!  
O ay—the wholesome madness of an hour—  
They served their use, their time; for every knight  
Believed himself a greater than himself,  
And every follower eyed him as a God;  
Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,

Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,  
And so the realm was made ; but then their vows—  
First mainly thro' that sullyng of our Queen—  
Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence  
Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?  
Dropt down from heaven? wash'd up from out the  
deep?

They fail'd to trace him thro' the flesh and blood  
Of our old kings : whence then? a doubtful lord  
To bind them by inviolable vows,  
Which flesh and blood perforce would violate :  
For feel this arm of mine—the tide within  
Red with free chase and heather-scented air,  
Pulsing full man ; can Arthur make me pure  
As any maiden child? lock up my tongue  
From uttering freely what I freely hear?  
Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it.  
And worldling of the world am I, and know  
The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour  
Woos his own end ; we are not angels here  
Nor shall be : vows—I am woodman of the woods,  
And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale  
Mock them : my soul, we love but while we may ;  
And therefore is my love so large for thee,  
Seeing it is not bounded save by love.

Here ending, he moved toward her, and she  
said,



'Good : an I turn'd away my love for thee  
To some one thrice as courteous as thyself—  
For courtesy wins woman all as well  
As valour may, but he that closes both  
Is perfect, he is Lancelot—taller indeed,  
Rosier and comelier, thou—but say I loved  
This knightliest of all knights, and cast thee back  
Thine own small saw, "We love but while we  
may,"  
Well then, what answer?'

He that while she spake,  
Mindful of what he brought to adorn her with,  
The jewels, had let one finger lightly touch  
The warm white apple of her throat, replied,  
'Press this a little closer, sweet, until—  
Come, I am hunger'd and half-anger'd—meat,  
Wine, wine—and I will love thee to the death,  
And out beyond into the dream to come.'

So then, when both were brought to full accord,  
She rose, and set before him all he will'd ;  
And after these had comforted the blood  
With meats and wines, and satiated their hearts—  
Now talking of their woodland paradise,  
The deers, the dews the fern, the founts, the  
lawns ;  
mocking at the much ungainliness,

And craven shifts, and long crane legs of Mark—  
Then Tristram laughing caught the harp, and sang :

‘Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bend the brier !  
A star in heaven, a star within the mere !  
Ay, ay, O ay—a star was my desire,  
And one was far apart, and one was near :  
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bow the grass !  
And one was water and one star was fire,  
And one will ever shine and one will pass.  
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that move the mere.’

Then in the light’s last glimmer Tristram show’d  
And swung the ruby carcanet. She cried,  
‘The collar of some Order, which our King  
Hath newly founded, all for thee, my soul,  
For thee, to yield thee grace beyond thy peers.’

‘Not so, my Queen,’ he said, ‘but the red fruit  
Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven,  
And won by Tristram as a tourney-prize,  
And hither brought by Tristram for his last  
Love-offering and peace-offering unto thee.’

He rose, he turn’d, then, flinging round her  
neck,  
Claspt it, and cried, ‘Thine Order, O my Queen !’  
But, while he bow’d to kiss the jewell’d throat,

Out of the dark, just as the lips had touch'd,  
Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek—  
'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him thro' the  
brain."

That night came Arthur home, and while he  
climb'd,  
All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom,  
The stairway to the hall, and look'd and saw  
The great Queen's bower was dark,—about his feet  
A voice clung sobbing till he question'd it,  
'What art thou?' and the voice about his feet  
Sent up an answer, sobbing, 'I am thy fool,  
And I shall never make thee smile again.'

## GUINEVERE.

QUEEN GUINEVERE had fled the court, and sat  
 There in the holy house at Almesbury  
 Weeping, none with her save a little maid,  
 A novice : one low light betwixt them burn'd  
 Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all abroad, 5  
 Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,  
 The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,  
 Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight  
 Sir Modred ; he that like a subtle beast 10  
 Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,  
 Ready to spring, waiting a chance : for this  
 He chill'd the popular praises of the King  
 With silent smiles of slow disparagement ;  
 And tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse, 15

Heathen, the brood by Hengist left ; and sought  
To make disruption in the Table Round  
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds  
Serving his traitorous end ; and all his aims  
Were sharpen'd by strong hate for Lancelot. 26

For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,  
Green-suited, but with plumes that mock'd the may,  
Had been, their wont, a-maying and return'd,  
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,  
Climb'd to the high-top of the garden-wall 28  
To spy some secret scandal if he might,  
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best  
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court  
The wiliest and the worst ; and more than this  
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by 30  
Spied where he couch'd, and as the gardener's hand  
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,  
So from the high wall and the flowering grove  
Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by the heel,  
And cast him as a worm upon the way ; 32  
But when he knew the Prince tho' marr'd with  
dust,  
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,  
Made such excuses as he might, and these  
Full knightly without scorn ; for in those days  
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn ; 40  
But, if a man were halt or hunch'd, in him

By those whom God had made full-limb'd and  
tall,

Scorn was allow'd as part of his defect,  
And he was answer'd softly by the King  
And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot help  
To raise the Prince, who rising twice or thrice  
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and  
went :

But, ever after, the small violence done  
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,  
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long  
A little bitter pool about a stone  
On the bare coast.

But when Sir Lancelot told  
This matter to the Queen, at first she laugh'd  
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,  
Then shudder'd, as the village wife who cries  
'I shudder, some one steps across my grave ;'  
Then laugh'd again, but faintlier, for indeed  
She half foresaw that he, the subtle beast,  
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers  
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.  
Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,  
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,  
Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye :  
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,  
To help it from the death that cannot die,

And save it even in extremes, began  
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,  
Beside the placid breathings of the King,  
In the dead night, grim faces came and went  
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear—  
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,  
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,  
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls—  
Held her awake : or if she slept, she dream'd  
An awful dream ; for then she seem'd to stand  
On some vast plain before a setting sun,  
And from the sun there swiftly made at her  
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew  
Before it, till it touch'd her, and she turn'd—  
When lo ! her own, that broadening from her feet,  
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it  
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.  
And all this trouble did not pass but grew ;  
Till ev'n the clear face of the guileless King,  
And trustful courtesies of household life,  
Became her bane : and at the last she said,  
' O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,  
For if thou tarry we shall meet again,  
And if we meet again, some evil chance  
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze  
Before the people, and our lord the King.  
And Lancelot ever promised, but remain'd,  
And still they met and met. Again she said,

‘O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence.’  
And then they were agreed upon a night  
(When the good King should not be there) to meet  
And part for ever. Passion-pale they met  
And greeted : hands in hands, and eye to eye,  
Low on the border of her couch they sat  
Stammering and staring : it was their last hour,  
A madness of farewells. And Modred brought  
His creatures to the basement of the tower  
For testimony ; and crying with full voice  
‘Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last,’ aroused  
Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike  
Leapt on him, and hurl’d him headlong, and he fell  
Stunn’d, and his creatures took and bare him off,  
And all was still : then she, ‘The end is come,  
And I am shamed for ever ;’ and he said,  
‘Mine be the shame ; mine was the sin : but rise;  
And fly to my strong castle overseas :  
There will I hide thee, till my life shall end,  
There hold thee with my life against the world.’  
She answer’d, ‘Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so ?  
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.  
Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself !  
Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou  
Unwedded : yet rise now, and let us fly,  
For I will draw me into sanctuary,  
And bide my doom.’ So Lancelot got her horse,  
Set her thereon. and mounted on his own.



And then they rode to the divided way,  
There kiss'd, and parted weeping : for he past,  
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,  
Back to his land ; but she to Almesbury ;  
Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,  
And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald  
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan :  
And in herself she moan'd ' Too late, too late ! '  
Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,  
A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high,  
Croak'd, and she thought, ' He spies a field of death ;  
For now the Heathen of the Northern Sea,  
Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court,  
Begin to slay the folk, and spoil the land.'

And when she came to Almesbury she spake  
There to the nuns, and said, ' Mine enemies  
Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood,  
Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask  
Her name to whom ye yield it, till her time  
To tell you : ' and her beauty, grace and power,  
Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared  
To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode  
For many a week, unknown, among the nuns ;  
Nor with them mix'd, nor told her name, nor sought,  
Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,

But communed only with the little maid,  
Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness  
Which often lured her from herself ; but now,  
This night, a rumour wildly blown about  
Came, that Sir Modred had usurp'd the realm,  
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King  
Was waging war on Lancelot : then she thought,  
' With what a hate the people and the King  
Must hate me,' and bow'd down upon her hands  
Silent, until the little maid, who brook'd  
No silence, break it, uttering ' Late ! so late !  
What hour, I wonder, now ? ' and when she drew  
No answer, by and by began to hum  
An air the nuns had taught her ; ' Late, so late !'  
Which when she heard, the Queen look'd up, and said,  
' O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,  
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep.'  
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

' Late, late, so late ! and dark the night and chill !  
Late, late, so late ! but we can enter still.  
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

' No light had we : for that we do repent ;  
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.  
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

' No light : so late ! and dark and chill the night !

O let us in, that we may find the light !  
Too late, too late : ye cannot enter now.

‘Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?  
O let us in, tho’ late, to kiss his feet !  
No, no, too late ! ye cannot enter now.’

So sang the novice, while full passionately,  
Her head upon her hands, remembering  
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad  
Queen.

Then said the little novice prattling to her,

‘O pray you, noble lady, weep no more ;  
But let my words, the words of one so small,  
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,  
And if I do not there is penance given—  
Comfort your sorrows ; for they do not flow  
From evil done ; right sure am I of that,  
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.  
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King’s,  
And weighing find them less ; for gone is he  
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,  
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen ;  
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,  
The traitor—Ah sweet lady, the King’s grief  
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,  
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.  
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great.

For if there ever come a grief to me  
I cry my cry in silence, and have done.  
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good :  
But even were the griefs of little ones  
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief  
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,  
That howsoever much they may desire  
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud :  
As even here they talk at Almesbury  
About the good King and his wicked Queen,  
And were I such a King with such a Queen,  
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,  
But were I such a King, it could not be.'

Then to her own sad heart mutter'd the Queen,  
'Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?'  
But openly she answer'd, 'Must not I,  
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,  
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'this is all woman's grief,  
That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life  
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round  
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,  
With signs and miracles and wonders, there  
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen.'

Then thought the Queen within herself again,

‘Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?’  
But openly she spake and said to her,  
‘O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,  
What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,  
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs  
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?’

To whom the little novice garrulously,  
‘Yea, but I know : the land was full of signs  
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.  
So said my father, and himself was knight  
Of the great Table—at the founding of it ;  
And rode thereto from Lyonesse, and he said  
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain  
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard  
Strange music, and he paused, and turning—there,  
All down the lonely coast of Lyonesse,  
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,  
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,  
He saw them—headland after headland flame  
Far on into the rich heart of the west :  
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,  
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,  
And sent a deep sea-voice thro’ all the land,  
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft  
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.  
So said my father—yea, and furthermore,  
Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,

Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy  
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,  
That shook beneath them, as the thistle shakes  
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed :  
And still at evenings on before his horse  
The flickering fairy-circle wheel'd and broke  
Flying, and link'd again, and wheel'd and broke  
Flying, for all the land was full of life.  
And when at last he came to Camelot,  
A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand  
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall ;  
And in the hall itself was such a feast  
As never man had dream'd ; for every knight  
Had whatsoever meat he long'd for served  
By hands unseen ; and even as he said  
Down in the cellars merry bloated things  
Shoulder'd the spigot, straddling on the butts  
While the wine ran : so glad were spirits and men  
Before the coming of the sinful Queen.'

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,  
' Were they so glad ? ill prophets were they all,  
Spirits and men : could none of them foresee,  
Not even thy wise father with his signs  
And wonders, what has fall'n upon the realm ? '

To whom the novice garrulously again,  
' Yea, one, a bard ; of whom my father said,

Full many a noble war-song had he sung,  
Ev'n in the presence of an enemy's fleet,  
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave ;  
And many a mystic lay of life and death  
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,  
When round him bent the spirits of the hills  
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame :  
So said my father—and that night the bard  
Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King  
As wellnigh more than man, and rail'd at those  
Who call'd him the false son of Gorlois :  
For there was no man knew from whence he came ;  
But after tempest, when the long wave broke  
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,  
There came a day as still as heaven, and then  
They found a naked child upon the sands  
Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea ;  
And that was Arthur ; and they foster'd him  
Till he by miracle was approven King :  
And that his grave should be a mystery  
From all men, like his birth ; and could he find  
A woman in her womanhood as great  
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang,  
The twain together well might change the world.  
But even in the middle of his song  
He falter'd, and his hand fell from the harp,  
And pale he turn'd, and reel'd, and would have fall'n,  
But that they stay'd him up ; nor would he tell

His vision ; but what doubt that he foresaw  
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen ?

Then thought the Queen, ' Lo ! they have set her on,  
Our simple-seeming Abbess and her nuns,  
To play upon me,' and bow'd her head nor spake.  
Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,  
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,  
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue  
Full often, ' and, sweet lady, if I seem  
To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,  
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales  
Which my good father told me, check me too :  
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one  
Of noblest manners, tho' himself would say  
Sir Lancelot had the noblest ; and he died,  
Kill'd in a tilt, come next, five summers back,  
And left me ; but of others who remain,  
And of the two first-famed for courtesy—  
And pray you check me if I ask amiss—  
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved  
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King ?'

Then the pale Queen look'd up and answer'd her,  
' Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,  
Was gracious to all ladies, and the same  
In open battle or the tilting-field  
Forbore his own advantage, and the King



In open battle or the tilting-field  
Forbore his own advantage, and these two  
Were the most nobly-manner'd men of all ;  
For manners are not idle, but the fruit  
Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'be manners such fair fruit ?  
Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousandfold  
Less noble, being, as all rumour runs,  
The most disloyal friend in all the world.'

To which a mournful answer made the Queen :  
'O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,  
What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights  
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe ?  
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,  
Were for one hour less noble than himself,  
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,  
And weep for her who drew him to his doom.'

'Yea,' said the little novice, 'I pray for both ;  
But I should all as soon believe that his,  
Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's,  
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be  
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen.'

So she, like many another babbler, hurt  
Whom she would soothe, and harm'd where she would  
heal ;

For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat  
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried,  
'Such as thou art be never maiden more  
For ever ! thou their tool, set on to plague  
And play upon, and harry me, petty spy  
And traitress.' When that storm of anger brake  
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,  
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen  
As tremulously as foam upon the beach  
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,  
And when the Queen had added 'Get thee hence,'  
Fled frightened. Then that other left alone  
Sigh'd, and began to gather heart again,  
Saying in herself, 'The simple, fearful child  
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,  
Simpler than any child, betrays itself.  
But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.  
For what is true repentance but in thought—  
Not ev'n in inmost thought to think again  
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us :  
And I have sworn never to see him more,  
To see him more.'

And ev'n in saying this,  
Her memory from old habit of the mind  
Went slipping back upon the golden days  
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,  
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,

Ambassador, to lead her to his lord  
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead  
Of his and her retinue moving, they,  
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love  
And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time  
Was maytime, and as yet no sin was dream'd,)  
Rode under groves that look'd a paradise  
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth  
That seem'd the heavens upbreking thro' the earth,  
And on from hill to hill, and every day  
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale  
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised  
For brief repast or afternoon repose  
By couriers gone before ; and on again,  
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw  
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,  
That crown'd the state pavilion of the King,  
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,  
And moving thro' the past unconsciously,  
Came to that point where first she saw the King  
Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd to find  
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,  
High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,  
'Not like my Lancelot'—while she brooded thus  
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,  
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.

A murmuring whisper thro' the nunnery ran,  
Then on a sudden a cry, 'The King.' She sat  
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet  
Thro' the long gallery from the outer doors  
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,  
And grovell'd with her face against the floor:  
There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair  
She made her face a darkness from the King:  
And in the darkness heard his armed feet  
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,  
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's  
Denouncing judgment, but tho' changed, the King's:

'Liest thou here so low, the child of one  
I honour'd, happy, dead before thy shame?  
Well is it that no child is born of thee.  
The children born of thee are sword and fire,  
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,  
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts  
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;  
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm  
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,  
Have everywhere about this land of Christ  
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.  
And knowest thou now from whence I come—from  
him,  
From waging bitter war with him: and he,  
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,

Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,  
He spared to lift his hand against the King  
Who made him knight : but many a knight was slain ;  
And many more, and all his kith and kin  
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.  
And many more when Modred raised revolt,  
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave  
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.  
And of this remnant will I leave a part,  
True men who love me still, for whom I live,  
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,  
Lest but a hair of this low head be harm'd.  
Fear not : thou shalt be guarded till my death.  
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies  
Have err'd not, that I march to meet my doom.  
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,  
That I the King should greatly care to live ;  
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.  
Bear with me for the last time while I show,  
Ev'n for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinn'd.  
For when the Roman left us, and their law  
Relax'd its hold upon us, and the ways  
Were fill'd with rapine, here and there a deed  
Of prowess done redress'd a random wrong.  
But I was first of all the kings who drew  
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all  
The realms together under me, their Head,  
In that fair Order of my Table Round,

A glorious company, the flower of men,  
To serve as model for the mighty world,  
And be the fair beginning of a time.  
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear  
To reverence the King, as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their  
King,  
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
To honour his own word as if his God's,  
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,  
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
And worship her by years of noble deeds,  
Until they won her ; for indeed I knew  
Of no more subtle master under heaven  
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,  
Not only to keep down the base in man,  
But teach high thought, and amiable words  
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,  
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.  
And all this throve before I wedded thee,  
Believing, "lo mine helpmate, one to feel  
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy."  
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot ;  
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt ;  
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,  
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,

Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite  
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,  
And all thro' thee ! so that this life of mine  
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,  
Not greatly care to lose ; but rather think  
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,  
To sit once more within his lonely hall,  
And miss the wonted number of my knights,  
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds  
As in the golden days before thy sin.  
For which of us, who might be left, could speak  
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee ?  
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk  
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,  
And I should evermore be vex't with thee  
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,  
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.  
For think not, tho' thou wouldst not love thy lord,  
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.  
I am not made of so slight elements.  
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.  
I hold that man the worst of public foes  
Who either for his own or children's sake,  
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife  
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house :  
For being thro' his cowardice allow'd  
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,  
She like a new disease, unknown to men,

Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,  
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps  
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse.  
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.  
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns !  
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart  
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,  
The mockery of my people, and their bane.'

He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch  
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.  
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.  
Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neigh'd  
As at a friend's voice, and he spake again :

'Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,  
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,  
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die  
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,  
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.  
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce  
law,  
The doom of treason and the flaming death,  
(When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.  
The pang—which while I weigh'd thy heart with one  
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,  
Made my tears burn—is also past—in part.  
And all is past, the sin is sinn'd, and I,



Lo ! I forgive thee, as Eternal God  
Forgives : do thou for thine own soul the rest.  
But how to take last leave of all I loved ?  
O golden hair, with which I used to play  
Not knowing ! O imperial-moulded form,  
And beauty such as never woman wore,  
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee—  
I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,  
But Lancelot's : nay, they never were the King's.  
I cannot take thy hand ; that too is flesh,  
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd ; and mine own flesh,  
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries  
“ I loathe thee : ” yet not less, O Guinevere,  
For I was ever virgin save for thee,  
My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life  
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.  
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.  
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,  
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,  
Hereafter in that world where all are pure  
We two may meet before high God, and thou  
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know  
I am thine husband—not a smaller soul,  
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,  
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.  
Thro' the thick night I hear the trumpet blow :  
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts  
Far down to that great battle in the west,

Where I must strike against the man they call  
My sister's son—no kin of mine, who leagues  
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights,  
Traitors—and strike him dead, and meet myself  
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.  
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;  
But hither shall I never come again,  
Never lie by thy side; see thee no more—  
Farewell!

And while she grovell'd at his feet,  
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,  
And in the darkness o'er her fallen head,  
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.

Then, listening till those armed steps were gone  
Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found  
The casement: 'peradventure,' so she thought,  
'If I might see his face, and not be seen.'  
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!  
And near him the sad nuns with each a light  
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,  
To guard and foster her for evermore.  
And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,  
To which for crest the golden dragon clung  
Of Britain; so she did not see the face,  
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,  
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,

The Dragon of the great Pendragonship  
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.  
And even then he turn'd ; and more and more  
The moony vapour rolling round the King,  
Who seem'd the phantom of a Giant in it,  
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray  
And grayer, till himself became as mist  
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretch'd out her arms and cried aloud  
' Oh Arthur ! ' there her voice brake suddenly,  
Then—as a stream that spouting from a cliff  
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base  
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale—  
Went on in passionate utterance :

' Gone—my lord !

Gone thro' my sin to slay and to be slain !  
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.  
Farewell ? I should have answer'd his farewell.  
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,  
My own true lord ! how dare I call him mine ?  
The shadow of another cleaves to me,  
And makes me one pollution : he, the King,  
Call'd me polluted : shall I kill myself ?  
What help in that ? I cannot kill my sin,  
If soul be soul ; nor can I kill my shame ;  
No, nor by living can I live it down.

The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,  
The months will add themselves and make the  
years,

The years will roll into the centuries,  
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.

I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.

Let the world be ; that is but of the world.

What else ? what hope ? I think there was a hope,

Except he mock'd me when he spake of hope ;

His hope he call'd it ; but he never mocks,

For mockery is the fume of little hearts.

And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven

My wickedness to him, and left me hope

That in my own heart I can live down sin

And be his mate hereafter in the heavens

Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,

Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint

Among his warring senses, to thy knights—

To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took

Full easily all impressions from below,

Would not look up, or half-despised the height

To which I would not or I could not climb—

I thought I could not breathe in that fine air

That pure severity of perfect light—

I wanted warmth and colour which I found

In Lancelot—now I see thee what thou art,

Thou art the highest and most human too,

Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none

Will tell the King I love him tho' so late?  
Now—ere he goes to the great Battle? none :  
Myself must tell him in that purer life,  
But now it were too daring. Ah my God,  
What might I not have made of thy fair world,  
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?  
It was my duty to have loved the highest :  
It surely was my profit had I known :  
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.  
We needs must love the highest when we see it,  
Not Lancelot, nor another.'

Here her hand

Grasp'd, made her vail her eyes : she look'd and  
saw

The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,  
'Yea, little maid, for am I not forgiven?'  
Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns  
All round her, weeping ; and her heart was loosed  
Within her, and she wept with these and said;

'Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke  
The vast design and purpose of the King.  
O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,  
Meek maidens, from the voices crying "shame."  
I must not scorn myself : he loves me still.  
Let no one dream but that he loves me still.  
So let me, if you do not shudder at me,

Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you,  
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you,  
Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;  
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,  
But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites;  
Pray and be pray'd for; lie before your shrines;  
Do each low office of your holy house;  
Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole  
To poor sick people, richer in His eyes  
Who ransom'd us, and haler too than I;  
And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine  
    own;  
And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer  
The sombre close of that voluptuous day,  
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King.'

She said: they took her to themselves; and she  
Still hoping, fearing 'is it yet too late?'  
Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.  
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,  
And for the power of ministration in her,  
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,  
Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived  
For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past  
To where beyond these voices there is peace.



THE  
PASSING OF ARTHUR.





## THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,  
First made and latest left of all the knights,  
Told, when the man was no more than a voice  
In the white winter of his age, to those  
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,  
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,  
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King :

‘I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
I mark’d Him in the flowering of His fields,  
But in His ways with men I find Him not.  
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.  
O me ! for why is all around us here  
As if some lesser god had made the world,

But had not force to shape it as he would,  
Till the High God behold it from beyond,  
And enter it, and make it beautiful?  
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,  
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,  
And have not power to see it as it is :  
Perchance, because we see not to the close ;—  
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,  
And have but stricken with the sword in vain ;  
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend  
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm  
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.  
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death :  
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,  
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd  
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown  
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear  
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight !  
Hail, King ! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.  
Farewell ! there is an isle of rest for thee.  
And I am blown along a wandering wind,  
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'  
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change  
Their season in the night and wail their way  
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the  
dream

Shrill'd ; but in going mingled with dim cries  
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,  
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,  
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail  
Pass to new lords ; and Arthur woke and call'd,  
'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,  
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries  
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild  
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake :  
'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,  
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field ;  
But in their stead thy name and glory cling  
To all high places like a golden cloud  
For ever : but as yet thou shalt not pass.  
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death  
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man ;  
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—  
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,  
And with him many of thy people, and knights  
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser  
grown  
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.  
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.  
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :

Far other is this battle in the west  
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,  
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,  
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,  
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine  
To war against my people and my knights.  
The king who fights his people fights himself.  
And they my knights, who loved me once, the  
stroke  
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.  
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way  
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw  
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,  
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,  
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,  
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse—  
A land of old upheaven from the abyss  
By fire, to sink into the abyss again ;  
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,  
And the long mountains ended in a coast  
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away  
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.  
There the pursuer could pursue no more,  
And he that fled no further fly the King ;  
And there, that day when the great light of heaven  
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,

On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.  
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight  
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.  
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea :  
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew  
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold  
With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell  
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought,  
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,  
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he  
slew ;

And some had visions out of golden youth,  
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts  
Look in upon the battle ; and in the mist  
Was many a noble deed, many a base,  
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,  
And ever and anon with host to host  
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail  
hewn,  
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash  
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks  
After the Christ, of those who falling down  
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;  
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,  
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,  
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs  
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail  
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death  
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,  
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,  
A dead hush fell ; but when the dolorous day  
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came  
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew  
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide  
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field  
Of battle : but no man was moving there ;  
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,  
Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave  
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro  
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down  
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,  
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with  
Rome,  
And rolling far along the gloomy shores  
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
And whiter than the mist that all day long  
Had held the field of battle was the King :

' Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the  
world,  
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,  
And beats upon the faces of the dead,

My dead, as tho' they had not died for me?—  
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n  
Confusion, till I know not what I am,  
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.  
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere : ' My King,  
King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,  
There also will I worship thee as King.  
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live  
Who love thee ; but who hates thee, he that brought  
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,  
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.'

Then spake the King : ' My house hath been my  
doom.

But call not thou this traitor of my house  
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.  
My house are rather they who sware my vows,  
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.  
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,  
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,  
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.  
King am I, whatsoever be their cry ;  
And one last act of knighthood shalt thou see  
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King  
Made at the man : then Modred smote his liege  
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword



Had beaten thin ; while Arthur at one blow,  
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,  
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd  
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;  
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,  
Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,  
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
That stood on a dark strait of barren land :  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep  
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we  
Shall never more, at any future time,  
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
Walking about the gardens and the halls  
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
I perish by this people which I made,—  
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again  
To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,

I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm  
That without help I cannot last till morn.  
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how  
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across  
And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;  
And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
In aftertime, this also shall be known :  
But now delay not : take Excalibur,  
And fling him far into the middle mere :  
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :  
' It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—  
A little thing may harm a wounded man ;  
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,  
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping  
down

By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd  
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd  
There in the many-knotted waterflags,  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
' Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?  
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
' I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :  
' Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,

Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd  
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight :  
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,  
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
His palms together, and he cried aloud :

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
What good should follow this, if this were done ?  
What harm, undone ? Deep harm to disobey,  
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
An act unprofitable, against himself ?  
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
What record, or what relic of my lord  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath

And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,  
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,  
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.  
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."  
So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
To all the people, winning reverence.  
But now much honour and much fame were lost;

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
And hid Excalibur the second time,  
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :  
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :  
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !  
Authority forgets a dying king,  
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye  
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,

For, thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
In whom should meet the offices of all,  
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;  
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an  
arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.  
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur :  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.  
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :

'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,  
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.  
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;  
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :  
'My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.  
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear  
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,  
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,  
And would have spoken, but he found not words ;  
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,

O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,  
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,  
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick !  
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.

He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—  
And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
Beneath them ; and descending they were ware  
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these  
Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them



A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
And, as it were one voice, an agony  
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.  
So to the barge they came. There those three  
Queens  
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his  
hands,  
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,  
And dropping bitter tears against a brow  
Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white  
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon  
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;  
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops  
Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls—  
That made his forehead like a rising sun  
High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ;  
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;  
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
From spur to plume a star of tournament,

Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :  
' Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?  
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
For now I see the true old times are dead,  
When every morning brought a noble chance,  
And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
Such times have been not since the light that led  
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
Which was an image of the mighty world,  
And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
And the days darken round me, and the years,  
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :  
' The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?  
I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within himself make pure ! but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by  
prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them  
friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
But now farewell! I am going a long way  
With these thou seest—if indeed I go  
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—  
To the island-valley of Avilion;  
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
Revolving many memories, till the hull  
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,

The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn  
Amazed him, and he groan'd, 'The King is gone.'  
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,  
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb  
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;  
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and  
cried,  
'He passes to be King among the dead,  
And after healing of his grievous wound  
He comes again; but—if he come no more—  
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,  
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we  
gazed  
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,  
They stood before his throne in silence, friends  
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?'

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but  
faint  
As from beyond the limit of the world,  
Like the last echo born of a great cry,  
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice  
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb  
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,

Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
Down that long water opening on the deep  
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
From less to less and vanish into light.  
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

THE END.

TO THE QUEEN.



## TO THE QUEEN

O LOYAL to the royal in thyself,  
And loyal to thy land, as this to thee—  
Bear witness, that rememberable day,  
When, pale as yet, and fever-worn, the Prince  
Who scarce had pluck'd his flickering life again  
From halfway down the shadow of the grave,  
Past with thee thro' thy people and their love,  
And London roll'd one tide of joy thro' all  
Her trebled millions, and loud leagues of man  
And welcome ! witness, too, the silent cry,  
The prayer of many a race and creed, and clime—  
Thunderless lightnings striking under sea  
From sunset and sunrise of all thy realm,  
And that true North, whereof we lately heard  
A strain to shame us : ' keep you to yourselves ;



So loyal is too costly ! friends—your love  
Is but a burthen : loose the bond, and go.  
Is this the tone of empire ? here the faith  
That made us rulers ? this indeed, her voice  
And meaning, whom the roar of Hougoumont  
Left mightiest of all peoples under heaven ?  
What shock has fool'd her since, that she should  
speak

So feebly ? wealthier—wealthier—hour by hour !  
The voice of Britain, or a sinking land,  
Some third-rate isle half-lost among her seas ?  
*There* rang her voice, when the full city peal'd  
Thee and thy Prince ! The loyal to their crown  
Are loyal to their own far sons, who love  
Our ocean-empire with her boundless homies  
For ever-broadening England, and her throne  
In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle,  
That knows not her own greatness : if she knows  
And dreads it we are fall'n.—But thou, my  
Queen,

Not for itself, but thro' thy living love  
For one to whom I made it o'er his grave  
Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,  
New-old and shadowing Sense at war with Soul  
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,  
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain  
peak,  
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still ; or him

Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one  
Touch'd by the adulterous finger of a time  
That hover'd between war and wantonness,  
And crownings and dethronements : take withal .  
Thy poet's blessing, and his trust that Heaven  
Will blow the tempest in the distance back  
From thine and ours : for some are scared, who  
mark,

Or wisely or unwisely, signs of storm,  
Waverings of every vane with every wind,  
And wordy trucklings to the transient hour,  
And fierce or careless looseners of the faith,  
And Softness breeding scorn of simple life,  
Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold,  
Or Labour, with a groan and not a voice,  
Or Art with poisonous honey stol'n from France,  
And that which knows, but careful for itself,  
And that which knows not, ruling that which knows  
To its own harm : the goal of this great world  
Lies beyond sight : yet—if our slowly-grown  
And crown'd Republic's crowning common-sense,  
That saved her many times, not fail—their fears  
Are morning shadows huger than the shapes  
That cast them, not those gloomier which forego  
The darkness of that battle in the West,  
Where all of high and holy dies away.



